

February 27th, 2023
Katharine Morris

In Support of:

**S.B. 4: AN ACT CONCERNING CONNECTICUT'S PRESENT AND FUTURE HOUSING NEEDS
—WITH AMENDMENTS**

Good afternoon Senator Moore, Representative Luxenberg, and the distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Katharine Morris, I'm a scholar-activist for intersectional environmental justice and a Connecticut resident who has lived in multiple environmental justice communities statewide.

I'm the founder of Seaside Sounds Club, an organization that advocates for climate and environmental justice centered on the celebration of culture and focused on protecting human, ecology, and animal health. We are part of the CT Renews coalition and steering committee.

I am testifying in strong support of S.B. 4: An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs—with amendments. Connecticut has an opportunity to make real progress towards fixing the housing crisis with this bill. Connecticut can become a leader in housing justice for the rest of the country and we need to start now. There are a lot of powerful and innovative pieces of this legislation to really move us in that direction. Everyone deserves safe, healthy and affordable housing and it's time our laws reflect that!

There is an abundance of research on the impacts of housing on mental and physical health as well as social wellbeing and economic prosperity. The history of redlining is precise and ever-present in Connecticut. According to the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard, 48.4% of renters in CT are cost-burdened paying 30% or more of their income on rent. Living in [ALICE](#) is no wonderland particularly when National Low Income Housing Coalition data shows that there is a shortage of 85,403 rental homes in CT available for those in need. Making matters worse, extreme weather events from the climate crisis can wash homes away in moments, lighting a fire under us (*literally*) to prepare for the worst of tomorrow today. This means acknowledging the lessons of yesterday namely the climate refugees crisis as shown after [Hurricane Maria left 130,000 Puerto Ricans homeless](#)—many of whom sought refuge in CT—only to be stuck in hotels. We must be proactive in our efforts to handle the housing issues we face today while factoring in the impending destruction of climate change.

I appreciate the bill's inclusion of the:

- Winter Eviction Moratorium
- Complaint form for tenants (albeit lacking accountability measures)
- Program funding for homes in EJ communities to improve energy efficiency, install solar panels, and remove environmental hazards.
- The rent cap (albeit too high)

Respectfully, I recommend the following amendments to strengthen the bill:

- The Winter Eviction Moratorium needs enforcement. **Landlords who evict their tenants during the winter must be fined** as a method of negative reinforcement.
- The bill should include institutional support by **creating an office within the department of housing to administer services to support tenants rights** (e.g retrieving security deposits; requiring landlords to do routine maintenance; and ensuring the health and safety of the tenants).
- The rent cap needs to also include **good cause eviction** to prevent unfair evictions. Moreover, the criteria for 'good cause' and 'unfair' must be delineated.
- The rent cap percentage should be **2.5% period not 4% with inflation**. Consider what 4% means for ALICE residents. Housing is a human right, not simply a market for absentee landlords. Truthfully, 2.5% is still too high.
- **Homelessness in of itself must be addressed with fervor and impatience. Invest in ending homelessness in every way possible.** No person should be without a room over their head or a place to call home. When you wonder how to solve the issue of homelessness and are plagued with the thought of budget constraints, just imagine it. Imagine yourself, your mother, your child, your father, your siblings homeless in the dead of Connecticut's winter or sweltering in a heat wave. No more normalizing homelessness.

Today represents an opportunity to address the housing crisis Connecticut residents have long been facing. Passing S.B.4 with amendments will be a significant stride in improving the quality of life of our communities. I **urge the Committee to move our state in the right direction by amending and passing S.B. 4 An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs.**

Thank you,
Katharine Morris